

# *Brother Luke*

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By  
*Elsie Rhea Smith*





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# Brother Luke

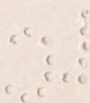
By  
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JOHNSTON COMPANY PUBLISHERS  
416-418 JACKSON STREET  
DALLAS, TEXAS  
1909

PZ3  
S64617B

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DEDICATED TO  
GEORGE A. MYERS, NASHVILLE, TENN.,  
WITH THE KINDLY REMARK,  
"A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED





## Brother Luke

When the pale moon's radiance was falling gently on your bed, when the morning star was shining brightly, when the dusk of evening was falling softly, have you been led by the angel within you to the mirror of self-realization and thanked God for the glorious privilege of being a man—a mere man?

When walking along a woodland path have you felt your heart beat in resonance with the spheres, and suddenly become conscious of a desire to kiss the sky and hug the sod?

When basking in the light of your ideals have you reveled in the thrill and flow of nature, the mingling of God and man that inevitably widens into the eternal, then given rein to the

## BROTHER LUKE

beautiful human and vowed to achieve the noblest destiny possible.—becoming one's self?

If you have felt thus, ignore the petty clutch of conventionality and clasp hands with me, stranger though I am. Quivering with harmony, we'll listen to the silvery cadence, the divine melody of the universal orchestra, dance to the music of the spheres, laugh at time and space that focus into a vast immutable *now* and try to be dutiful children of the great "I Am," who bids the animal die upward into the angel.

I'm Brother Luke, if you please.

"Brother Luke?" you say.

Such I wish you to call me. Friend, my submissive soul bends toward the bosom of the Absolute every time I hear those words. I liken them unto the famous ring that pricked its owner when he forgot duty and followed desire.



## BROTHER LUKE

Since friendship is the subtle play of one personality through another, as sunlight through a prism, I shall draw the mystic curtain of individuality that you may understand the significance of the appellation. In the school of life under the formidable task-master, Experience, men sometimes untangle the net of sin in which they have become imprisoned, and exult with ecstatic joy that matter is at last subject to spirit. Not so with me. My reformation was wrought in the mysterious realm of the great beyond—in the land where angels dwell, in the region where poor lost souls bemoan their fate.

Be not incredulous! Think me not mad! *I know* the infinite joy, the thrill of triumph that permeates the liberated soul as it mounts up, up, up. *I know* the soothing calm, the unutterable bliss of being welcomed by

## BROTHER LUKE

God's holy band. Horror of horrors! *I know* the agony of the unrighteous that finds vent in one loud, long, final scream of despair when cast among the spirits of darkness.

Whence this knowledge?

Kindred creature, I shall tell you. There happened to me an experience such as has never befallen mortal man. (At least, I know of no similar incident.) You would suppose me an old man; I am not. It took but a few days to change my hair from jetty black to white, to weaken my limbs and unstring my nerves, so that I trembled at the least exertion and was frightened at a shadow.

Human imagination cannot conceive the unparalleled magnificence and sublime terror of the scenes that infused a new, strong impetuous vitality into my being after chilling me to the marrow. Believe me, human conceptions are too frail to picture the sublimity



## *BROTHER LUKE*

of heaven; human thoughts are too weak to grasp the meaning of the awful place called hell. What know you of white-robed angels chanting hymns of eternal love to God? What know you of wild, wailing voices raving in the land of eternal darkness?

Oh, that earthly eyes might see, and earthly souls take timely warning! I'd re-live my terrible experience a thousand times over to save errant humanity from the awful doom that awaits! I see them going down, down, down. I tell them. They believe not! "Brother Luke is mad! Listen not! Heed not! Drive him away," are words I hear every day.

Friend in all the world there must be one who will believe. To you I am talking; to you I shall relate my story.

In the noon of manhood, enjoying the spontaneous strength and vigor of a healthy animal that loves life for

## *BROTHER LUKE*

the mere pleasure of living, I began the exploration of a cave to satisfy myself concerning a spacious room it was said to contain.

If deep and dewy lustre of eyes, fringed with dark, silky lashes, delicate coloring of cheeks and lips, soft, rounded chin, with pretty dimples, pure lines of slim throat and snowy neck have held you captive, you understand why I began my search into the bowels of the earth. With an enthralling smile, but petulant pucker of dainty lips, my guest-to-be had said in slow, languid tones: "I'll visit Ravenworth if you promise something thrilling; something sensational. I'm bored to death with monotony."

I promised, and was planning a midnight fete among the ghostly stalagmites and stalactites of nature's cavern when the accident occurred. (Not an accident, either; for in the



## *BROTHER LUKE*

gigantic drama of life every so-called "accident" has its niche.)

A violent storm arose during my third visit to the gloomy yet fascinating subterranean cavity where the queen of my heart was to reign queen of the festival. I took refuge near the mouth of the cave and watched the wild havoc of the elements with the grim satisfaction of a sheltered beast. A lurid blaze of lightning shattered a tree. A mighty roar of thunder deafened my ears. The sky became a flaming sheet of fire. Timbers crashed. The earth trembled. Seized with a convulsion of terror, I fell on my knees, imploring God to save me. Frozen with fear, I saw an avalanche of stone and dirt descending with a monstrous velocity. A terrific gush of waters, lashing with ungovernable fury, burst into a thousand conflicting channels; heaving, boiling, hissing, the frenzied current swept me into a pit



## *BROTHER LUKE*

formed by the slipping of softened strata.

After an unknown period of utter insensibility there came to my brain a dim idea of motion and sound—the tumultuous motion of my heart, the quavering sound of its beating, a pause in which all was blank. Then sound and motion and touch; a tingling sensation pervaded my frame. The mere consciousness of existence without thought ensued—a condition that lasted long. Then, very suddenly, thought and shrinking terror, and earnest endeavor to comprehend my true state, succeeded by a strong desire to lapse into insensibility. Finally a rushing revival of energy and a successful effort to move. I reached out my hand; it fell upon damp soil. I suffered it to remain there many minutes. I tried to exercise my reason. I dared not employ my vision, not that I feared to look upon things horrible; I grew

## BROTHER LUKE

aghast lest there be nothing to see. At last, with wild desperation, I unclosed my eyes. My worst fears were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I started to my feet, trembling in every fiber. I flung my arms wildly above and around me in every direction. I felt nothing. Cold beads of perspiration stood upon my brow. The agony of suspense grew intolerable. I moved forward cautiously, with my arms extended, and my eyes straining from their sockets in hope of catching a faint ray of light. Thus groping my way blindly, through blackness and vacancy, I sought to learn the extent of the enclosure. I proceeded a few paces before my outstretched hands encountered what seemed to be a slimy wall. The ground was slippery, and I was weak; I stumbled and fell. Undaunted, I crept slowly on until my forehead seemed bathed in clammy va-



## *BROTHER LUKE*

por, and a peculiar odor of decaying fungus arose to my nostrils. I had located myself. I stood at the brink of the Wizard's Well. An intervening wall of many feet had been crushed. I grew sick and numb, and thought of flinging myself into the yawning abyss. The instinctive recoil of flesh and blood at the near approach of death restrained me. I retraced my steps and surged violently against the impeding mass of debris that denied me light and life. I called loudly for help. Only the echoes of my own voice came back to me. Maddened by the sound, I clung to the cold stones, whining like a beaten cur, until, overcome by excessive fatigue, I succumbed to the irresistible drowsiness of a delirious sleep.

When I awoke a burning thirst consumed and a gnawing hunger tortured me. I seized a pointed stone and worked for hours, hoping, longing,

## BROTHER LUKE

dreaming that every stroke would reveal a glimmer of light. Weakened by lack of food and exertion, unable to raise my arm longer, I sank hopelessly to the ground and viewed my fate. Oh, God, what a fate! the living tenant of a grave, doomed to languish for hours, days or weeks with the grim monster Death bending over me patiently waiting for my pain-stricken body to consume every vestige of its energy and substance.

I cursed the woman whose whim had caused my misery. I cursed her over and over. I screamed, "Vain woman, see what thy vanity has cost!" I prayed that an icy chill might forever run through her frame, and a sense of insufferable anxiety always oppress her. I screamed louder and louder. Moments of insanity must have possessed me. *I believed that she would hear!* As if in answer to the illusion, a beautiful apparition



## BROTHER LUKE

floated before me. Isabel stood by my side—radiant, smiling Isabel. With a burning glance she gazed into my eyes, took my hands, pressed trembling lips to my cheeks and whispered: “To you I shall reveal myself.” Her smile and manner changed. Suddenly she became transformed into a wretch horrible to see. Lifeless, lusterless, melancholy eyes stared past me; thin, writhing lips twitched; distorted features quivered; palsied hands shook. A shrill voice shrieked: “What greater doom would you ask? Little by little I’ve frittered my soul away. The spirit has gone out of my body and left it to flourish in a sort of vegetable existence!”

I shuddered.

The ghastly phantom disappeared. Beautiful Isabel once more was by my side, smiling innocently, adorably.

I shrank from her.

## *BROTHER LUKE*

She clung to me; wound her arms around my neck, drooped her head on my shoulder, looked into my eyes wistfully, showered throbbing, burning, quivering kisses on my lips, until ominous, pulsating silence grew between us. Her arms slowly relaxed and fell limply. Stillness, intense, absolute, became a tension. A growing, irresistible force pressing us apart, steadily, inexorably, driving me back, step by step, against the clammy wall.

I hissed: "Begone!"

She waved a mute farewell, and left me to bewildered thought.

I strove to call her back. The straining cry died in my throat. My lips stiffened with horror. Somewhere in the darkness she was making mockery.

The taunting, scornful laughter left ringing in my ears, became a low murmur, like the gurgle of rippling water. Lured by the sound, despite pangs



## *BROTHER LUKE*

and aches, I dragged myself to the loathsome pit, kindly christened a well, and made my way around it many times, hoping that I would find a rivulet trickling down. Disappointed, I took frantic pleasure in dislodging a stone and letting it fall. For many seconds I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm. At length there was a sullen plunge, succeeded by loud echoes.

The blood rushed in torrents to my heart. I saw my mangled corpse at the bottom of the stagnant pool.

Shaking in limb, I groped my way back to the wall, resolving to perish with the direst agonies of starvation rather than risk the awful mutilation my imagination had pictured.

Overwhelmed by gloomy forebodings, I burst into tears and wept bitterly, then threw myself on my knees to God, and implored His aid toward

## BROTHER LUKE

accomplishing my deliverance. Arising with new vigor and hope, I yelled loud and long. No answering message being heard, I summoned all my strength, and began digging with almost superhuman effort; I knew that I was fighting my last battle for *Life*, and was desperate. Gasping for breath, my heart almost bursting from my bosom, the most appalling of deaths confronting me, I felt every particle of the energy which had buoyed me up depart, and fell senseless.

After I recovered from the swoon, agitation kept me awake many weary hours ere sheer exhaustion induced a deep death-like sleep that lasted I know not how long. Of only one fact am I sentient: during that awful unknown period I made a prolonged feeble effort to free myself from vast, sable, overshadowing wings cruelly pushing me into a hideous vault.



## *BROTHER LUKE*

When I gained possession of my faculties the phantasma that tortured me so potently during sleep assumed vivid distinctness. The unendurable oppression of my lungs, the scarcely perceptible pulsation of my heart, the rigid torpor of my muscles, had but one meaning—Death.

This awful conclusion forced itself into the innermost chamber of my consciousness, and despair, such as no other species of wretchedness begets, seized me.

Buried alive, occupying the same position I would occupy when the grewsome conqueror worm would devour my body, I struggled to a sitting posture, and there, in the intense raylessness of subterranean night, looked backward along the short vista of my life and forward to the God of all eternity. A long, wild, continuous wail of agony, the cry of a troubled soul, burst from my parched lips and re-

## *BROTHER LUKE*

sounded throughout the realms of darkness.

Oh, the anguish of that moment!

I stared bewilderedly at my irrevocable past as a helpless child stares at a monster preparing to strike.

Trembling, quailing, I heard a multitude of voices, vibrant with magical melody, varying in cadence from syllable to syllable, blend into unity, low, thrilling, intense.

Suddenly a strangely luminous cloud, pinioned on silvery wings, poised in mid-air. The shrouding veil of darkness became fragments of smoke and fire, embellished with queer figures, studded with scintillating gems sparkling like the spray from many fountains.

Slowly garlands of flowers formed a beautiful throne at the apex of the ethereal brilliancy, and mute, sorrowful eyes, thus enshrined, withered my soul with gentle reproach.



## BROTHER LUKE

The wings began to droop. The eyes grew sadder and sadder. Strange, oh, strangest mystery of all! In quietly, unuttered words those twin orbs sounded my funereal dirge.

A hooded figure, robed in sable draperies blacker than the blackest night, touched me with invisible hands. I clinched the bony fingers and tried to fling them off. They gripped tighter and tighter. (Their wiry clutch makes me shudder yet.)

"For God's sake," I began wildly.

A muffled voice whispered.

My blood froze with unnamable, sickening terror. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to things long forgotten.

The voice again whispered.

I breathed no longer. My pulses were still. My heart ceased beating. But volition had not departed. Drawn resistlessly by repugnant magnetism, I dragged my benumbed limbs, heavy

## *BROTHER LUKE*

with congealed blood, reluctantly after my pilot.

We traversed many strange spaces thus. A dead weight, a heaviness for which there is no name upon earth, depressed me.

The spectral monster and I entered a gloomy room festooned with lustrous tapestry shimmering with blue-gray lights, wandering chill like the rays of a wintry moon.

From that sombre fabric, "softly, silky as a golden lion's hide," pallid faces peered with pupilless eyes, and withered hands beckoned me to them.

The great folds of mystical, shrouding drapery stirred gently. A tense rustle, as of deep sighs and death-groans, shuddered upon the silence.

Gaunt, fantastic dancers, from which the very devils might turn away aghast, embraced loathsome comrades, each more hideous than the other, and swayed in rhythmic step to weird, in-



## BROTHER LUKE

sidious music that ever and anon burst into wild, piercing sobs—horrible strains of pleading agony.

Gradually the music ceased; slowly it died, like breaking waves. Mournful echoes, rolling afar off, became weak and undistinguishable.

The fiendish revelers uttered three piercing screams and retreated into sepulchral darkness.

Seven skeletons, whose dry, rattling bones gleamed through rent mantles, proceeded with slow, stately step to an ebony table. A vague, formless Shadow, neither of man, nor of God, or any familiar thing, crept from the quivering draperies of the room and joined them. They—the skeletons and the Shadow—seated themselves.

Pale, motionless flames, from tall, slender torches, illumined the melancholy festive board.

Groaning miserably, the Shadow poured purple wine, or blood, from a

## *BROTHER LUKE*

massive urn and served the mystic fraternity.

By one accord, that skeleton crew of vacant eye-caverns and grinning jaws, rose and drank to my health.

Spectral arms bare of bones, ligaments, tissues, yet very strong, encircled me. I lay upon the breast of the Shadow. Although all semblance of life had deserted me, my muscles quivered, my arteries throbbed, and I heard a soothing voice, mellowed by distance, say: "Lingering spirit, quit thy fragile tenement of clay."

The oppressive darkness became unendurable. I cried out in pain—the pain of that crucial moment, between life and death, in which the soul has lost sight of what was and knows not what is to be.

Some mighty force seemed to tear my being asunder, yet the sensation was pleasurable. A prophecy, as of bliss, thrilled me. My newly-fledged



## BROTHER LUKE

spirit, trembling with joy, felt that it had passed through death unto life.

A golden-roseate light descended slowly. Sweet, strange voices called. A form clad in a robe intensely white spread vari-tinted wings, beautiful as a glittering dream of fairyland, and majestically bore me onward and upward to the City Eternal.

The guiding spirit rapped a pearly gate with a jeweled wand, and disappeared in a cloud of glorious light.

The massive portal swung open. A host of angels chanted: "Welcome to the holy temple of thy Heavenly Father."

The words became sad and tremulous ere they had finished. A cloud, a shadow as of sorrow, settled over that white-robed throng.

They seemed to shrink from my new, my redeemed self, with dread.

I was filled with dismay.

## BROTHER LUKE

One from their midst, taller and handsomer than the rest, with a crown upon his head, a star upon his forehead, stretched out his hand kindly and led my shrinking soul to the throne of the Living God.

Dazzled, I, almost unconsciously, bowed before the excessive majesty of a great light surpassing in brilliancy the glistening raiment of angels or aught I had ever seen.

Celestial spirits and beautiful seraphs bowed, too.

Through the innumerable eons of time I shall not forget the awful solemnity of those moments in which the sacred silence of holy creatures worshipping a holy God, reigned supreme.

A low, clear voice, a thousand times sweeter than the musical nightingale's, began to sing: "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints!"



## *BROTHER LUKE*

A vast multitude joined in soft refrain.

The angels, the seraphs and my wondering soul raised from our stooping posture.

An interval of joyous mirth, divine and orderly, yet exuberant, ensued. Then all eyes were centered on me as so many bits of steel would be drawn to a powerful magnet.

The rejoicing ceased. Their countenances grew grave. All save one, whose livery denoted highest rank or order, folded their wings and walked away.

Left thus in the presence of the most high God (screened by a mist before my eyes), I screamed in terror.

The angel silenced me by an imperious gesture, advanced to a golden pedestal like unto clear glass, opened the Book of Life lying thereon, read the record of my earthly career, then

## BROTHER LUKE

turned to me and said: "*You* called *yourself* a Christian?"

I cowered with shame.

He spoke again: "Omnipotent God of Hosts, the Angel of Death has delivered into my care a luke-warm soul who confessed Lord Jesus before men, but followed Him not."

I heard words that I did not understand.

The penetrating halo round the great white throne trembled and became pale.

A messenger of holy wrath, at the hideous sin of creature to Creator, looked at me with flashing eyes that bespoke unutterable loathing.

Paralyzed, I returned the gaze fixedly until his glance became less cruel, and half-tender smiles softened his lips.

Presently that divinely beautiful being caught my hands, held them in his own, murmuring in tremulous



## BROTHER LUKE

tones: "Most miserable of wretches, *I would thou wert cold or hot!* Thy misguided spirit, smeared with grave spots, is too tender to grow callous, though leashed by the endless sorrows of hell; but thou art unfit for heaven." With this he uttered a clarion-like call and flung me from him.

Filled with regret that burned fiercer than fire, I saw my previous escort appear. He led me to the gate whence I had entered.

That perfect pearl, opalescent with heavenly lights, swung backward.

Mad with fear, I tore my hair wildly, and flung myself at the feet of him who was starting me to hell.

Spiritual arms raised me; spiritual lips pressed my own; soft sighs modeled themselves into a sweet, tranquil voice, saying: "God-forsaken, I pity you. But the choice was yours. Depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

## BROTHER LUKE

Spirits with "eyes more lustrous than the morning and forms transparent as flames" waved a sad farewell.

My soul sickened and became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into a dreary, unfathomable abyss.

I fell many leagues, struggling fiercely. By a mighty effort, I kept my eyes upturned, and watched the glorious sphere of beauty and light fade into a dimly radiant dot.

A scorching surface arrested my descent. A loud blast, as of many trumpets, fell upon my ears. A harsh grating shivered through me. A heavy door rushed back. An outstretched arm grabbed me. A medley of untamed voices, a wild pandemonium of noises, greeted me. I had entered hell!

Innumerable demons croaked: "HI VILLAIN, HOW CAME YOU HERE?"



## *BROTHER LUKE*

Shrieking fiends, sometimes one uppermost, sometimes another, dragged me over jagged stones that bit like the sear of white-hot metal.

By intermittent flashes and gleams, shattering the shadows and rending the midnight darkness, I made out the writhing and tossing of myriad arms and legs floundering hopelessly in an immense caldron of hissing, spluttering, molten stuff.

I knew my destination, and fought these red-eyed devils with the strength of forty tigers.

Step by step they gained.

Hot winds wafted stifled moans and a crisp crackling as of burning flesh. Hot drops fell thick and fast like fiery rain.

Still we neared that awful abyss.

Overpowered, I was being lifted for the plunge, when a headless giant, emitting vast lurid flames from a ragged stump of a neck, left the poor

## BROTHER LUKE

wretches trying to climb perpendicular sides and rushed at us, waving a huge fork of flaming prongs coiling in serpentine fashion.

My tormentors fled. Terrified beyond thought, I tried to follow, but strayed from their path.

My heedless steps brought me face to face with a very old man, muttering in hellish vernacular, which I understood: "I'm—the—most—miserable rubbish—cast—into—this — gulf — of oblivion. No—one—here—would—exchange — his — heart — for — mine." Catching sight of me, he added: "You — can—merge—your—individuality—in—the—mass; — but—I—am—alone — forever!" He then broke into a fit of boisterous laughter, drew a halter round his neck, and vanished.

I stumbled along a dark path, and encountered one who commanded: "Halt! Halt! The Black Pool's ahead!"



## BROTHER LUKE

"The Black Pool?" I asked.

"*The Black Pool*," he replied.

"What's that," said I.

"Ah!" he cried, with blending surprise and amused interest.

Swaying so near his breath was on my cheek, he hissed: "Novice of novices, fellow-fiend just arrived, I'll show you around!"

Steady-glowing eyes searched mine; forked flames rushed from widespread mouth and nostrils; strong, sinewy hands, so large they might have been the paws of some prehistoric monster, knotted round me.

"For God's sake!" I pleaded in childish pathos.

"Crafty soul!" he yelled, and strengthened his clutch.

Powerless as a new-born babe, I was dragged over parched plains strewn with live embers of recent fires.

## *BROTHER LUKE*

We passed many bedraggled wanderers, clad in garments of woe, who shrank from us as pallid ghosts; only once did we pause—there came from a dank pit a long, sobbing cry—half wail, half shriek—the anguished cry of a woman-soul. So sudden and startling was the sound that my master-demon trembled violently, and stopped to listen. It came again, more sorrow-laden, more piercing than before.

With a quiver of excitement he lurched forward.

A phosphoric glow appeared in the distance. My captor uttered a raven-like croak and tossed me in the air.

I fell limp and lifeless, but conscious.

Unable to move, I watched the scarlet wall creep nearer.

Pungent clouds of smoke rose in angry billows. Fierce gusts of heat whirled past. Stinging sparks fell in red hail. Countless serpents dragged



## *BROTHER LUKE*

their slimy bodies near me ; one licked my cheek with its forked tongue. All space was rent with a volume of sound as though the heart of Hell had burst asunder. Bellowing with rage, mighty flames and melted ore gushed from a gaping orifice.

A seething mass of bodies, fiercely beating the leaping flames were borne on the molten current that swept over me.

Flesh and blood could not have endured the awful heat and pressure of that roaring inferno ; but I lived on.

Parched, scorched, blistered, shot through with the agony of ten thousand stings, I lay rigid and heavy as burning stone, while the shipwrecked of a lost world were tossed hither and thither by the raging elements above. How I longed to be with them ! how I strove to rise to the flame-flecked surface ! But no ; weighed down by a billion fiery tons, I could

## *BROTHER LUKE*

not even strike the friendly flames that circled my throat and shriveled my lungs.

The mad flow gradually became normal, and formed a burnished lake at the foot of a gentle incline, where it glowed like a vast charcoal bathed with arterial blood.

My suffering increased a hundred-fold. The scattered embers on my bosom stirred restlessly, and leaped with snake-like virulence, to the cavity surrounding my shrunken heart. Immediately a brood of adders thrust their venomous tongues into my vitals.

I shrieked so loud that all Hell trembled. Mad flames leaping from my mouth circled higher and higher, until they licked the horrid roof of that cursed pit and fell in a shower of fiery darts.

Pierced with the barbed weapons begotten of my own misery, possessed by the strength of many demons, I



## *BROTHER LUKE*

sprang from my loathed couch and ran with the blind fury of a flying fiend.

The dark pavilion of hellish space shook with my mighty tread. Undaunted by the constant swaying, I bounded in reckless glee, on the quivering surface, and terrified, shrinking spirits who begged me cease lest dreaded fire rush forth.

My caprice was of short duration. A scorpion whip lashed my back. An execreable shape, more horrible than aught I had ever seen, arrested me with much ceremony, and led me, a dejected prisoner, into the presence of the queerest tribunal I ever confronted.

Creatures strange and wild nodded effusively.

A grisly terror, majestic through awfulness, mounted a revolving rostrum, centrally located, and called in

## *BROTHER LUKE*

harsh, strident tones: "Princes of Hell, come to order!"

A flaunting crimson banner was unfurled with obeisance, and greeted with three cheers for his Satanic Majesty. Then the loathsome deformities proceeded, with stately decorum, to alcoves formed at regular intervals in the circular wall of Hell's court-room, where grim justice is meted to wayward souls, and bowed low to the terrible Thing addressing them.

They remained in mock-reverential attitude until the clear ring of a gavel broke the shivering silence.

The ungodly shape, or presiding officer, fastened narrowing eyes on me and smiled scornfully. That must have been the signal to begin, for numerous voices chanted in mocking monotone: "Choose the one thou lovest best."

I looked from the regal-robed enormity to the fawning characteristics doing his bidding. (Characteristics,



## *BROTHER LUKE*

I say, because each seemed to be one of his distinguishing traits objectified into space and crystallized into the exact form of the parent wickedness lurking in the atrocious sire.)

Simultaneously those sin-born monsters stamped with the die of the evil that gave them birth beckoned to me, saying: "Come to thy affinity."

Dazed beyond comprehension, I gazed from progeny to progenitor.

They called again.

I remained motionless.

"Fool!" hissed a snake-like voice.

"Fool!" echoed many others.

"Let thy life suggest the symbol," advised one.

"Look into your breast," commanded the master of ceremonies.

I tried to obey, but fell ere I had penetrated the dermis. (Out of bewildered chaos came a sense of repellant degradation. I saw the like-

## BROTHER LUKE

ness of *two* imps snugly nestled in my bosom.)

“Contempt of court!” “Read Article one-hundred-thirty-seven of our Code,” stirred my benumbed faculties.

A clear, modulated voice read: “All inmates of Hell are entitled to legal defense by the commander of their rank and order.”

Unable to select my intercessor, since I had brooded dual fiends, yet loath to reveal the fact, I shuddered with shame, and swore between gritted teeth that I would not receive aid.

The clumsy bulk and listless shadow, of which I harbored diminutive duplicates, smiled with parental indulgence, as though they deemed my act the whim of a petted child.

Exasperated beyond endurance, I shrieked that I would let no hellhound plead for me.



## BROTHER LUKE

Brilliant showers of sparks and jets of flame threw an infernal light over the grinning spectators.

Whirl! whirl! whirl! went the rostrum, gradually reddening into a coal which emitted a strong scent of brimstone.

As if by magic, the atmosphere cleared, and the abominable Chief Justice again sat in state.

I lay a groaning mass with all those abnormalities eyeing me.

Six drew swords.

I forced my pain-shot limbs to rise.

Turning to me, that awful combination of visages and appendages, bedecked in pompous paraphernalia, exclaimed: "I know why thou hast refused to choose a champion, and go to tell my father that he may deal with thee as befits his wisdom."

He then remarked, with malicious intonation: "Princely dignities, he is

## BROTHER LUKE

yours until I return. Entertain him royally. He! he! he!"

A wiry body, supporting a ponderous head that lolled from side to side, came forward.

"Follow me!" ejaculated sneering lips.

"Hurrah for Scoffer!" shouted the assembly.

Hands so thin they chilled clasped my arms. Restrained by unquiet submission, I followed through a long, dark passage to a dimly-lighted aperture.

He made a sweeping gesture, saying: "Puppet of a puny intellect, behold my brainy followers."

O God, that heart-rending sight!

Bowed with the weight of jutting foreheads, almost touching the floor, many were gazing at groveling creatures already weighed down. Others whose craniums had expanded proportionately, were huddled in reeling



## *BROTHER LUKE*

groups vainly trying to gain equilibrium. But the most pitiful were those whose foreheads had just begun to jut, whose craniums had just begun to expand; wild with despair, they begged me to save them from their awful doom.

I stood aghast.

"Their throes are ever violent," explained the cruel fiend.

I started to flee, but was checked by a look.

He continued in a lowered tone: "Many of these noble people pitted the wee bit of mind allotted to man against the Almighty, and actually sought to disprove His existence." In a faint whisper: "When all reach maturity, through intellectual prowess, we are going to subjugate Hell, rend the walls of space, shatter Heaven, and create new worlds out of the disorganized atoms."

## BROTHER LUKE

To my astonishment, he added: "Fool, you will not remember enough to tell," and led me back to the courtroom.

A serious group clamored for me as though I were a precious jewel. At last they agreed to give me to the one who could throw a spear the farthest. (I cannot refrain from inserting that a cunning smile lit the grim countenance of my late companion, and I thought I heard him murmur: "'Twill not always be so.")

Fortune decreed that the honor of next escorting me to his domain should fall to a greatly magnified counterpart of *Hands*—I am tempted to call him—who deserted me so abruptly at the first indication of the fiery deluge.

A few steps brought us to a marvelous cylinder of some unknown metal, which we entered. A few revolutions, and I was viewing an immense



## *BROTHER LUKE*

throng of dissimilarity. Only one bond seemed to unite that vast concourse of radically different types—all possessed enormous palms and abnormal, claw-like fingers. Kings and councilmen, rulers of empires and their retinue, presidents and members of the cabinet, judges, senators, politicians, merchants and employees, professional men, laborers, saloonists, distinguished brigands, lowly “crooks,” and every class of woman from the despised harlot to the haughty society devotee, were participating in a brawling rabble, each jeering or spurning the other.

I felt that I was laboring under an optical illusion, and asked an explanation.

Sighing heavily, he answered: “I am the pampered son of my father’s kingdom; he dotes on me because I bring more into his fold than any of the others; but mine is not a happy lot.

## BROTHER LUKE

I bid—bid high enough—the mighty fall. I fire men with the burning lust for pillage; vast armies rise. I tickle their brains with shrewd thoughts; markets are cornered and trusts born. I purchase women with mere baubles, and shabby excuses for men with things equally frivolous. What have I won? *A crowd of gibbering idiots*, who make my existence miserable by a continual babble of queer ideas, advanced by conventional criterions, that assign social positions more in accordance with the ability to satisfy the gluttonous appetite for gold, which I myself create, than aught else, it seems to me. For a long time I tried to reason with them. Day after day I propounded the infallible truth that ‘caste’ of which they prated, was man’s arbitrary arrangement, and rotten to the core. I asked them a thousand times over, ‘What is the difference in the cultured beauty who weds



## *BROTHER LUKE*

a suitor for his coin, and the greedy prostitute who welcomes him with wanton smiles?' I argued that the senator who lugged a bill into the statutes of the country he had sworn to protect, and received fifty thousand from a favored corporation, was not on a par with the fellow who stole fifty cents from him the following night. I was discussing this with that arrogant peacock yonder, strutting round with such an injured air, and explaining that he had bartered himself and impaired the prosperity of a nation, while the robber had smeared only his own soul, and entailed no disastrous results for others, when I decided upon my subsequent course of procedure. He exasperated me so that I vowed I would build a pen and confine them forever. In my wrath I exclaimed: 'Each of your hands shall increase three-fold, and thereafter develop according to the service you ren-

## BROTHER LUKE

dered me!' I often laugh at the justice of my hasty curse. Many who resented most impotently my Father's decree that all who barter themselves for gold shall be awarded membership in the fraternity known as the *Glittering Lights of Pandemonium*, and enjoy equally the privileges of said order, now trail elongated fingers and are objects of loathsome contempt to not a few whom they refused to countenance. Such is the nature of the quarrel you witness—servant taunting mistress, mistress scorning servant—such it will ever be."

He hastily concluded: "Look! Our abominable ex-senator is drifting this way. That colossal egotist is such a true exponent of American folly I cannot endure him longer. Let's be going."

I left, thinking of the poor wretch still at large, but dared not tell.



## BROTHER LUKE

The opening through which we had taken egress was barred when we returned. My escort demanded the reason angrily, and received the answer: "Be patient; the parade is not ready."

I inquired what was meant by "the parade," and was advised to bridle my curiosity.

Soon, too soon, we were admitted to the saddest spectacle I viewed in all Hell. Sharp screams, strangled cries, low moans—a woman sheeted in flame, entered. Thousands followed in her train. They were shrinking and pale. Their tear-stained features were illumined by fiery coils upon their brows. Their hearts were pierced, each, by a dagger, which they were vainly trying to extricate. Their suffering was intolerable.

A strong, majestic demon, of commanding physique, so human-like he might have been mistaken for men I

## BROTHER LUKE

had known, so despicable I burned with the desire to slay him, smiled sardonically and said to me: "The harvest is mine. I fain would show you the wily males who reaped those fair passion-flowers, but they are so treacherous we cast them into the Burning Caldron just as they arrive."

Ere he had ceased speaking, a corpulent monster, clothed in pendant, flapping tongues, interjected: "Brother, thou forgetest my assistance!"

"To be sure! Dear Liar, I most humbly beg thy pardon, and freely acknowledge that thy honeyed words helped me woo many from the path of virtue. Come; let's be merry!"

They locked arms and capered in diabolic glee.

The revel was interrupted by loud talking and heavy steps. A horned beast, more terrible than the horrors of Hell had suggested that Satan could be, entered.



## *BROTHER LUKE*

The Sire of All Evil addressed me: "My beloved son, Sin, has informed me of thy predicament. How came thee thus?"

I could force no words from my trembling lips.

Consternation was written on the countenances of all those infernal monsters.

The Devil seemed perplexed. He eyed me closely, shook me vigorously, then roared: "It never happened before; thou hast served them both the same!"

After a moment's silence he called: "Stumbling Block, Neglected Opportunities, I would speak with thee."

The two of whom I had perceived exact counterparts in my bosom followed him aside. The conversation waxed warm. They grew angry. Their voices became shrill shrieks. Blows were exchanged. Others rushed to the scene. A frantic fray ensued. The

## BROTHER LUKE

Devil smote them right and left. Brilliant flames spurted from his distended mouth. The atmosphere became as a red coal. Suddenly he rushed at me, belching volumes of lurid purplish stuff. By some unique maneuver of the mad fire-like element I was enveloped in a surging cloak that bore me to the dizzy pinnacle of hellish space; and there, bellowing in wrath, half the queer phenomena coiled into a flying bolt that slit the adamantine wall and the other half flung me into Stygian darkness.

Involuntarily I caught my breath, awaiting a battering crash, which would leave me a crushed, formless thing; but I suddenly realized that instead of falling I was floating horizontally.

I entered my new situation content to remain inert. Absence from poor, raving souls filled me with bliss. A soft, warm wind fanned my cheeks



## *BROTHER LUKE*

with crystal freshness. I sang from uncontrollable joy. Although I fancied myself floating on a limbous stream, carrying me to some unknown legacy of terror, I could not bring myself to worry. Whatever the goal of the fluid substance that moved in gentle undulations and bore me on its current, I was happy. Dumb longings pulsed my bosom, subtle hope pricked my dreamy thoughts. I began craving mystic possibilities. Resting from sorrow and pain, I turned my eyes upward and whispered: "O God, I thank Thee for this moment of peace." The words were scarcely breathed when bold hope urged: "Prayer availeth much." I repeated the comforting message until it seemed fraught with precious meaning for a poor wretch like me. Floating in the ebbing, flowing matter that was drifting I know not whither, I prayed with all the earnestness of wisdom purchased by the

## BROTHER LUKE

fatal errors of a misspent life and a brief sojourn in Satan's dominion:

"Almighty God, Ruler of limitless space and myriad universes, I beg Thee hearken to the plea of a miserable outcast. O Father of all, pity the poor sinner from whose eyes fearful scales have fallen. Out of Thy boundless mercy, pardon, if Thou canst, the deeds I committed while in darkness; for, O God, since the winged arrow of truth has pierced my consciousness I am Thine. If it be possible for me to transcend this miserable gulf, take me, and I will serve Thee as Thou seest fit."

When I ceased speaking I became aware of a gradually increasing sound like the desolate moaning of the sea. The current plunged with headlong impetuosity. Mountainous waves heaved from the foaming surface. With swinging jerks I was drawn into a rapid gyration that rose into a



## BROTHER LUKE

circular rift of sky, of a deep, bright blue. Through it there sifted the rays of a full moon tinted with beautiful gleams I had never known them wear.

Filled with unutterable thanks for deliverance from that dark cavity of infernal regions, spellbound by the general burst of grandeur, I heard a voice, intensely sympathetic, deeply resonant, call: "Fear not! The God of eternal verities, to whom thou hast dedicated thyself, would speak to thee." Immediately I beheld two pillars of light, one perpendicular, the other horizontal, changing their positions until they came together and formed a cross.

Far upon the distance streamed a flood of golden light. Four gigantic figures, robed in gleaming white, steered a heavenly barge, fringed with emeralds, rubies and pearls, to the foot of the holy bars. The Lamb of Calvary

## BROTHER LUKE

alighted—men seized their Living Sacrifice and nailed Him to the cross.

The foul perpetrators of the deed and the angels disappeared, leaving me alone with the crucified Savior.

The life-blood ebbed from gaping wounds, where sharp spikes cruelly pierced tender flesh; the suspended body drooped heavily, and hung by bleeding hands; the crowned head slowly sunk upon a laboring breast. His breathing grew hard and became great gasps, but no cry of pain broke the awful stillness of ethereal space.

The dying eyes of the Son of God gazed below; in their depths was infinite yearning. I followed the glance and saw, O reader! I saw the great drops of blood that oozed from the torn flesh of the Lowly Nazarene divide into innumerable streamlets that diverged toward a light-hearted crowd of every nationality, laughing, chatting, love-making, buying, selling, and



## BROTHER LUKE

feasting their eyes on the splendors of the world; not one looked upward; not one heeded the redeeming blood that fell within easy reach.

The bleeding Christ sighed. His sigh seemed to say: "Tell them of their spiritual dearth. Tell them that I died to fling open to *all* the gates of eternal life."

The scene shifted. I viewed a broad plain, where representatives of every nation were domiciled in their customary abodes. Stately mansions and thatched roofs reared themselves side by side; crude wigwams and the frozen homes of the Eskimos were sprinkled promiscuously among the magnificent triumphs of architecture, yet the vast throng was dwelling in perfect harmony. I wondered, until I traced the course of the precious blood and saw each tiny stream join a human heart, then join it to another, thus binding all by a network of mystic

## BROTHER LUKE

cords that made them as brother to brother.

I continued looking. Dissensions arose; many began wrangling over dogmas and creeds; others strayed into fair fields of allurements. I grew sad—sadder than words can tell. The beautiful picture was marred. Oh, how I longed to tell those sin-washed creatures to keep themselves unspotted from the world! How I quailed lest they forfeit their birthright!

A hand was laid gently on my shoulder. A soft voice whispered: "This vision of Christ crucified, has been given thee that no trace of doubt obscure thy mission. Three and thirty years are allotted to thee, in which thou shalt plead with the erring and warn them of the wrath to come. Thou shalt also admonish Christians to abide in brotherly love and stray not, lest they, too, inherit an eternity of woe."



## *BROTHER LUKE*

A long flight of ebony steps shone in the moonlight. Led by strange intuition, I descended, and scanned a gloomy corridor flushed with weird light. A spectral form, shrouded in the habiliments of the grave, motioned me to enter. I obeyed. By significant gestures I was made to understand that I should prepare for an ordeal. Imagine my horror when I saw tall, gaunt forms bearing my stiffened corpse toward my disembodied soul! The face had assumed the usual pinched and sunken outlines. The lips were of marble pallor. The chin drooped heavily. The eyes were lusterless and half open. The arms fell with stony rigidity.

The whole company of white-appareled creatures seemed to feel deeply the solemnity of the occasion. Half the ghost-like figures grasped my spiritual being, half kneaded my breathless body with wasted semblances of





## BROTHER LUKE

ersed the atmosphere, sweet sounds of the swinging of the censers of angels that mingled strangely with the hoarse confessions of dark crimes. Clear, concise thought revived suddenly; even the most minute details of my experience arrayed themselves in exact sequence.

Tingling with impatience to begin my new life, I made a desperate effort to move, and failed. I then amused myself by wondering how long I had been absent and who would rescue me. Several hours must have passed before I heard the clank of steel and the dull thud of falling earth. The welcome noises grew louder. The glad hum of familiar voices fell upon my ears. A flood of light pierced the darkness. Anxious faces bent over me. Strong arms carried me to the open. A curious crowd gathered around me. A grave physician felt my pulse and shook his head du-

## *BROTHER LUKE*

biously. I was hurried into the keeping of white-capped nurses.

Three weeks later I sat by my window a hopeful convalescent, and read a sympathetic note from Isabel. I recalled the spectral woman of the cave, and shuddered with a quiver of antipathy; but a flutter of my heart convinced me that the aversion was not real, so I resolved to tell Isabel all and begin "pleading with the erring." I kept the resolve. It was she who dubbed me "Brother Luke."

Friend, I am weary.

Good-bye.



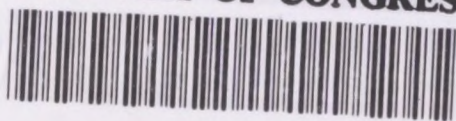
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